



Centre for Education Systems

INTERNATIONAL COMPARATIVE REVIEW

ACCOUNTABILITY POLICY

Summary of country report (3 pages)

Authors: AI generated with human checking
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Scotland

A decorative graphic in the bottom right corner consists of several overlapping, curved segments in shades of dark blue, light blue, and light green, resembling a stylized arc or a portion of a circle.

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The EPPI Centre

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Scotland – AI generated Accountability Policy summary

RQ1: Purposes, Values and Aims

Scotland's accountability system aims to enhance educational quality and equity through a transparent, collaborative framework focused on continuous improvement. Key objectives include providing public assurance via inspections, promoting improvement by sharing effective practices, and informing national policy with evidence-based advice. The system is underpinned by core values of equity, ensuring every child has the same opportunity to succeed; excellence, focusing on raising achievement; collaboration between stakeholders; and fairness, particularly in the transparent allocation of resources. Inclusion is also central, with a legal emphasis on reducing inequalities and closing the poverty-related attainment gap.

RQ 2 – Levels, measures, and mechanisms of accountability

Accountability in Scotland operates through a multi-layered, hybrid structure combining state control, professional, and partnership models. The framework includes vertical mechanisms, such as inspections by Education Scotland and reporting from local authorities to the Scottish Government, and horizontal mechanisms like peer collaboration and stakeholder engagement through Parent Councils. Key actors include the Scottish Government, Education Scotland, the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), local authorities, and schools. Quality is measured via national data from the National Improvement Framework (NIF), school self-evaluation, and inspection reports, which are made publicly available to inform parents and guide improvement strategies. Unlike some systems, Scotland does not publish school league tables.

RQ 3 – Managing change and policy processes

The Scottish Government and its agency, Education Scotland, lead accountability policy development. The process is not driven by a piecemeal approach but by comprehensive reform efforts, often precipitated by external reviews. Recent changes have been significantly shaped by the 2021 OECD Review of Curriculum for Excellence and the 2022 Ken Muir Report. These reviews recommended separating the inspection and curriculum support functions of Education Scotland, leading to the Education Scotland Bill (2024). This reform process involved extensive public and stakeholder consultation to ensure changes, like the creation of an independent inspectorate and a new qualifications body, are collaborative and coherent.

RQ 4 – Assessments of effectiveness and evaluation

The accountability system is evaluated through regular and ad hoc mechanisms. The HM Chief Inspector of Education produces an annual report for the Scottish Parliament, and the National Improvement Framework (NIF) is also reviewed annually. School inspections provide ongoing, direct evaluation of performance against national standards. Additionally, ad hoc evaluations by independent bodies, such as the OECD and the International Council of Education Advisers (ICEA), provide external assessments that significantly influence policy reform. These evaluations are used to drive change, as seen in the recent structural reforms to Education Scotland and the SQA.

RQ 5 – Historical, cultural, and political influences

Scotland's accountability policy is shaped by its unique political and cultural context. The decentralised governance model supports the tailoring of policies to reflect social democratic values emphasizing inclusion and equity. However, the system is also influenced by global trends, including neoliberal discourse that prioritizes measurable outcomes and the "anglo-neoliberalisation" effect of policies from England. Concerns over declining PISA performance have driven a focus on addressing underachievement, while a traditional emphasis on professional self-evaluation has been challenged by a rise in performativity. Policy change is often managed through "appropriative legitimation," where reforms incorporating new ideas are presented as building on existing practices to ensure continuity.

RQ 6 – Impact on outcomes and workforce

Research evidence concerning the intended and unintended effects of the accountability system on student outcomes or the teaching workforce was not identified in the systematic review.

Timeline- recent accountability reforms

- **Early 2000s: Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) Introduction:** Rationale: To provide a holistic, learner-centred education. Key Features: Established a comprehensive new curriculum framework, shifting towards a more decentralised model where schools design their curriculum within national guidelines.
- **2015 & 2021: OECD Reviews of CfE:** Rationale: To provide independent assessment and recommendations for the education system. Key Features: Highlighted governance issues and recommended separating inspection from curriculum support, strengthening professional leadership, and simplifying policies.

- **2017: Education Governance: Next Steps report:** Rationale: To empower schools and communities. Key Features: Emphasised a shift to a school and teacher-led system, strengthening the role of parents and local stakeholders in decision-making.
- **2022: Ken Muir Report Published:** Rationale: To recommend reforms for national education bodies. Key Features: Recommended replacing the SQA and removing the inspection function from Education Scotland to create an independent inspectorate.
- **2024: Education Scotland Bill Introduced:** Rationale: To implement the recommendations of the OECD and Muir reviews. Key Features: Proposed the establishment of a new qualifications body, Qualifications Scotland, and an independent HM Chief Inspector of Education.